

2019 | By: Yue Zhang, Research Assistant



## The Community-led Program's Role in Confronting Community Challenges

Regional Sustainable  
Development Partnerships

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**EXTENSION**



Center for Urban and  
Regional Affairs | **cura**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



# The Community-led Program's Role in Confronting Community Challenges

An exploratory study of community members' perspectives of community issues and the Promise Neighborhood's role

---

August, 2019 | By: Yue Zhang, Research Assistant

This is a co-publication of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, and Promise Neighborhood of Central Minnesota. Project funding was provided by Mary Page Community-University Partnerships Fund.

The Community Assistantship Program (CAP) is a cross-college, cross-campus University of Minnesota initiative coordinated by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP). Funds for CAP have been generously provided by the McKnight Foundation. The content of this report is the responsibility of the author and is not necessarily endorsed by CAP, CURA, RSDP or the University of Minnesota.

The Central Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnership brings together local talent and resources with University of Minnesota knowledge to drive sustainability in agriculture and food systems, tourism and resilient communities, natural resources and clean energy. The Partnerships are part of University of Minnesota Extension.

Promise Neighborhood of Central MN (PN) engages Talahi families and helps them achieve their educational, economic, and community aspirations.

© 2019 by The Regents of the University of Minnesota.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution--- NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA. Any reproduction, distribution, or derivative use of this work under this license must be accompanied by the following attribution: "© The Regents of the University of Minnesota. Reproduced with permission of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)." Any derivative use must also be licensed under the same terms. For permissions beyond the scope of this license, contact the CURA editor.

This publication may be available in alternate formats upon request: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA); Phone: (612) 625-1551; E-mail: [cura@umn.edu](mailto:cura@umn.edu); [www.cura.umn.edu](http://www.cura.umn.edu)

*The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.*

## Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
BACKGROUND .....	5
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS .....	7
THE GROUNDED-THEORY APPROACH .....	7
INTERVIEWEE RECRUITMENT .....	8
QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN .....	8
IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS .....	9
THE OBSERVATION .....	9
THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS .....	10
FINDINGS .....	11
POVERTY .....	11
INCREASED CULTURAL DIVERSITY .....	12
CHANGING AND GROWING DEMANDS .....	12
OBSTACLES OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT .....	16
CHALLENGES FOR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT .....	17
PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD'S ROLE .....	20
IMPLICATION .....	23
CONCLUSION .....	23
REFERENCES .....	25
APPENDIX I .....	26
THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS .....	26
APPENDIX II .....	28
THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SCHOOL STAFF .....	28
APPENDIX III .....	30
THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC SECTOR OFFICIALS .....	30
APPENDIX IV .....	32
THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR VOLUNTEERS .....	32
OBSERVATION NOTES .....	36

## Executive Summary

Saint Cloud has the largest population in Minnesota's central region and the tenth largest city in the state, with a population of 67,984 U.S. (Census Bureau, 2017). In the last decade, the city's racial demographic has drastically changed. The percentage of White population decreased from 90% to 79%, and the non-US born residents increased from 2% in 2000 to 10% in 2017. Incomes are rising, while inequality exists in the development of different neighborhoods.

The Promise Neighborhood is a community-led nonprofit organization located in the southeast area of St. Cloud, Minnesota, serving for low-income families and residents of color in the surrounding area for many years. The increasingly diverse racial, cultural backgrounds and varying socioeconomic status among residents in this area bring challenges to community development, reshape the role of community organizations, and require adaptive designs of services and programs.

The purpose of this community-based participatory research is to explore the changing demands in the community and to support the organization to realize better outcomes. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders of distinctive expertise and roles in the community to understand different perspectives on community issues, youth development, family prosperity, and community organizations' collaboration. This report shows the result of 17 interviews with 20 interviewees. Through the thematic analysis approach, six themes were generated and constructed by several sub-themes, as shown below:

Table1.

*The themes and sub-themes generated from interviews with stakeholders.*

Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Poverty</b>	Affordable housing Lack of healthy food High free- or reduced-lunch rate Homelessness Lower socioeconomic status
<b>Increased cultural diversity</b>	Immigrants/relocated residents Diverse ethnicity Racial inequality Stereotype Leadership/capacity building
<b>Changing and growing demands</b>	Social connections Job opportunities/decent payment Inclusiveness Need assessment/research Cultural and social adaptation (mutual) Accessibility to resources (i.e. health/mental health, transportation, healthy food/supplies, affordable daycare/after-school-care, etc.) Effective/timely, sustainable, culturally-appropriate solutions
<b>Obstacles for family engagement</b>	Lack of knowledge/education/skills Not value it/lack of interest

	Negative previous experience
	Schedule conflict
	Language barrier
	Lack of diverse representative
<b>Challenges of children's development</b>	Cultural shock/lack of preparedness
	Health-living issues and traumatic experiences
	Difficulty in the recruitment and retention of diverse workforce in schools
	Disadvantage of reactive social and emotional learning efforts
	Lack of trust
<b>Promise Neighborhood's role</b>	Current contribution: engage and support families
	share information about community resources
	provide after-school services
	represent community members
	Future expectations: align community efforts
	expand the scope of services

---

This qualitative study provides evidence for a demand of a better collaborative solution to promote family prosperity and children's healthy development in the community, indicates the importance of the following phases of studies exploring culturally-appropriate collaborative models, and informs the Promise Neighborhood's design of services to better serve the community and families.



## Background

Saint Cloud has the largest population in Minnesota's central region and it is the tenth largest city in the state, with a population of 67,984 U.S. (Census Bureau, 2017). In the last decade, the city's racial demographic drastically changed. From 2012 to 2017, the percentage of White alone population decreased from 90% to 79%, and the non-US born residents increased to 10%.

Among the 21% people of color, 12% were Black or African Americans, almost doubled than the percentage in 2012. The percentage of the Hispanic or Latino population changed from 0% to 3%. The percentage of Asian or Pacific Islanders remained to be 3%.

Generally, the job opportunity increased by 1.4% and incomes were rising. Saint Cloud's median household income was estimated at \$46,601 in 2017, which is expected to rise by nearly \$8,000 by 2019 (Minnesota Compass, n.d.). The Saint Cloud city's median household income increased by 19%, 4% higher than the amount of Saint Cloud Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

However, the city was projected to remain less wealthy than the Saint Cloud (MSA) (City of Saint Cloud, n.d.). About 23% of population's poverty status was determined with income below poverty, among which 29% were people aged between 18 and 64. 33% of total households were considered to be cost-burdened, which means that these households spent 30% or more of their monthly gross income to housing. It is suggested that people whose housing costs exceeded this threshold of affordability were more likely to struggle to pay for other basic necessities and needs, forcing difficult trade-offs (Minnesota Compass, n.d.). Currently, 21% of owner households and 47% of renter households were cost-burdened.

Inequality existed in the development of different neighborhoods. The residents living in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud had a lower level of average median household income (\$42,425) and a higher level of percentage of the population living below the poverty level (22%). Looking at the Talahi neighborhood located across the Sherburne County, Benton County, and the Stern County, the minority enrollment rate of the Talahi Community Elementary School was 82%, which was higher than the Minnesota state average of 32%, making it one of the top 30% schools of diversity. Black students consisted of 65% of all 549 students in this school. 91% of students were eligible for free lunch or reduced lunch, which was among the top 5% of public schools in Minnesota (Public School Review, n.d.). The nearby schools were experiencing similar issues and demographic characteristics.

Previous research conducted in the East Saint Cloud neighborhood (Finan & Hemmesch, 2018) and the 56304 zip code area (Garcia-Perez, 2017) showed that poverty contributed to challenges in the population living in this area, such as food insecurity and lack of transportation. There were distinctive concerns and challenges of the Somali refugee population in health, including trauma and mental or behavioral issues. Poverty-related stress was perceived to be associated with children's mental health issues. Single parenting tended to be more common among the Black and African-American population. The uninsured residents were more likely to be concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods and the areas with large minority populations such as

African Americans and Somali. Lacking social ties between these underserved populations and the perceived structured racism made the situation more severe.

The Promise Neighborhood is a community-led nonprofit organization located in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud, aiming at engaging families and helping families in the Talahi community to achieve educational, economic, and community aspirations. It has earned a positive reputation by serving low-income families and residents of color in the surrounding area for many years. Having the vision of improving children's academic achievement, helping families pursue economic success, creating a healthy and diverse neighborhood, and promoting residents' sense of identity and pride, the Promise Neighborhood provides free after-school programs for kids and youth, as well as resources and training for adults in the families. The increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds and varying socioeconomic status among residents in this area bring challenges to community development, reshape the role of community organizations, and require adaptive designs of services and programs.

The Promise Neighborhood Research Project is a community-based participatory research—i.e., community-led, university-assisted, and co-created research project that explores the community needs in the changing context in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud, specifically, the Talahi neighborhood. This research seeks to understand different perspectives on community issues, children's development, family prosperity, and community organizations' collaboration; how contextual changes have influenced the local community members' needs; and how these changes and needs affect the Promise Neighborhood's service providing strategy focusing on children and families. The research result is expected to help identify emerging concerns that community members perceived and suggestions for ongoing and upcoming strategies in order to promote the efficiency of allocating limited resources.

Aligned with the purpose of the research project, there are three basic research questions for this study:

- How do different groups of people in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud experience and perceive the change in racial demographics and community issues in the target area?
- How does the change influence their life and demands in the community?
- How should community organizations, such as Promise Neighborhood, respond to the demands children and families?

# Methodology and Methods

To answer the three research questions, in-person in-depth interviews were conducted with different groups of community stakeholders, including Promise Neighborhood's volunteers and staff, Promise Neighborhood's adult participants, local public schools' principals and staff, and the policymakers. An observation session was conducted to understand how the service for children was provided by the Promise Neighborhood normally and how the potential influence mentioned by community members may affect their future service planning. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the University of Minnesota, to protect the welfare of interviewees recruited to participate in research activities. The research process was developed under the principles of the community-based participatory research with the grounded-theory approach. The interviewees were recruited through referrals by stakeholders and contacts. The questionnaires were designed in accordance with the purposes of interviewing each type of stakeholder, which were modified and edited throughout the process whenever there was an emerging knowledge. Knowledge was purely generated from interviewees' inputs.

## The Grounded-theory Approach

The qualitative methodology—the grounded-theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is a systematic process of discovery that explores and facilitates the emergence of theories throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Instead of relying on pre-existing theories and analytical constructs, the grounded-theory approach requires maximum openness and flexibility which allows new contextualized theories to emerge from the inductive analysis of the empirically observed data. Therefore, researchers gather and compare data, remain open to all possible theoretical understandings of the data, and develop tentative interpretations about data through codes and categories. Before the theoretical saturation (i.e., there is no new categories and themes emerging from data), there is a need to go back to the field and gather more data to enrich and refine categories (Charmaz, 2014; Martin & Turner, 1986). The grounded-theory approach has an epistemology base of realism, one of the kinds of post-positivism. This positionality holds the belief that the potential knowledge is out there and can be captured by observations and empirical analysis. However, because of the limitation of methodologies, technologies, contextual disturbances, and human natures, the journey of approaching to the truth may be endless. Specifically, the grounded-theory approach assumes that social events and processes have objective reality in the sense that they take place irrespective of the researcher (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Hence the purpose of conducting grounded-theory research is to identify the regularity of how and why things happen in what context without any interference of researchers' interest and hypothesis.

Grounded-theory approach is an appropriate methodology for this research project in that there is a need to map out individuals' categories of experience and perspectives and to theorize a contextualized relationship that depicts the influence of the changing context on community



solutions. All the information comes out from participants' narratives through in-depth interviews.

## Interviewee Recruitment

As a community-based participatory research, this study was a partnership approach to research that equitably involved organizational representatives, community members, and the researcher in all aspects of the research process (Israel et al., 2008). As an exploratory study, it was important to be open and inclusive towards stakeholders' involvement. This study inquired community members' perspectives and experiences around community issues, family prosperity, collaborative solutions, children's development, and so on, thus the interviewees of this study contained a variety of stakeholders with different community roles and relationships with the Promise Neighborhood, including Promise Neighborhood's volunteers and staff who were knowledgeable in the organization and local families, Promise Neighborhood's adult participants who represented the underserved population, local public schools' principals and staff who had close connection with local families and children, and the community-level and city-level elected officials and policymakers who had the access to existing social service information.

The contact information of each group of interviewees was originally provided by the co-designers of the research project. More people of knowledge were referred by these original contacts. There were 27 stakeholders on the contact list. The researcher reached out to them and completed 17 interview sessions with 20 interviewees (there were 2 interview sessions that had 2 and 3 interviewees, respectively), within whom 7 were school stakeholders working at three local elementary and high schools, 6 were Promise Neighborhood's volunteers and staff members, 3 were working in the public sector, and 4 were Promise Neighborhood's parent participants. These stakeholders provided plural perspectives and experience around the topics.

To increase the involvement rate, the co-designers of the research sent out an introduction email to the ones they referred, briefly mentioned the project and connected them with the researcher. The researcher sent out a follow-up invitation email with a more detailed description of the study and the request for an interview with each of the contacts between February 2019 and May 2019. The interviews were scheduled when people replied with the interest of participating in this study. Most of the interviews took place in the meeting rooms where interviewees worked, depending on interviewees' availability and preference. Some interviews occurred in the Promise Neighborhood's building that was convenient for both sides.

## Questionnaire Design

The questionnaires were developed through the collaboration among the researcher and co-designers of this research. Besides the opening and ending questions, there were three main sessions included in all the questionnaires for different groups of stakeholders—community issues, children's development and family demands, and Promise Neighborhood's program. The questions were designed on the basis of the three research questions. Regarding specific

questions, they were designed for each group of interest according to the research purpose and the knowledge they were supposed to have. For school teachers, there were more questions about children's development, social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies, parents' engagement in children's education, and challenges in outreaching marginalized families (see Appendix I), while for school principals, questions would focus more on school policies, collaborative efforts with other institutions, and potential opportunities of future cooperation (see Appendix II). Promise Neighborhood's volunteers and staff were encouraged to describe more about their services and feedback from participants (see Appendix III). Policymakers were more knowledgeable in contextual information, general policies, and ongoing strategic planning (see Appendix IV). The questions for parents were more about their personal experiences of living in the community and the supports they wished to have (see Appendix V).

Serving to identify the phenomenon and patterns, the questions became progressively focused throughout the interview process. The interview protocols were refined and slightly re-structured with the inspiration from ongoing interviews.

## In-person Interviews

Saint Cloud is about 1.25-hour drive north of the Twin Cities in Central Minnesota. The researcher traveled to the city to conduct these on-site interviews. Each interview lasted 40 to 60 minutes. The total duration of all interviews was 749.2 minutes (about 12.5 hours). The researcher verbally described the study and checked if the interviewer would mind if the conversation was recorded. With the permission of being recorded, the researcher started the interview by following the questionnaire. Probing questions were asked according to interviewees' responses. At the end of each interview, the researcher checked if there would be more people of knowledge that the interviewee would like to help refer. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

## The Observation

The observation session was conducted on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 between 4:50 pm and 6:50 pm. The object was the Youth Night (i.e., Math Club), a signature bi-weekly activity on Friday nights held in the Promise Neighborhood's building. Since the research question inquires the influence of the changing context on Promise Neighborhood's service planning for children and families, this observation helped understand how the service for children was provided by the Promise Neighborhood normally, and how the potential influence mentioned by community members may affect their future service planning within or beyond the current setting. The researcher took descriptive and reflective notes during the session (see Appendix VI).

## The Thematic Analysis

Guided by the grounded-theory principles (Charmaz, 2014), category labels were not derived from existing theoretical formulations but grounded in the narrative data instead. The coding process was a continuous aspect of the analytic nature of the grounded-theory approach, which progressively identified and integrated categories of meaning (Holton, 2007). Firstly, on account of confidentiality, all interviewees were coded as “stakeholder + number” in sequence. A codebook was established to document stakeholders’ contact information and the interview progress. Then, line-by-line open coding was conducted on the transcripts. Descriptive labels were attached to discrete instances of interviewees’ perspectives and experiences. New labels were generated when new categories emerged. As coding progressed, the researcher identified higher-level analytical categories that systematically integrated lower-level descriptive categories into several meaningful sub-themes, and these sub-themes were integrated into six main themes in the end. The codes and categories were constantly compared with the previous ones by moving back and forth between the identification of similarities among and differences between emerging categories. Totally, 900 codes were meaningfully designated to sentences. Some descriptive statistics could be conducted to describe the distribution of these codes.

Finally, the narratives fell into six main themes: 1) poverty; 2) increased population diversity; 3) changing and growing demands; 4) obstacles for family engagement; 5) challenges of children’s development; and 6) Promise Neighborhood’s role. The largest part of the discussion was about the changing and growing demands in the community and what the Promise Neighborhood could contribute accordingly. The school and volunteer stakeholders had stronger voices on the obstacles for family engagement. Most perspectives of challenges regarding children’s development came from School stakeholders.

Table 2.

*The number of codes, by category, by group of stakeholders.*

Group	Number of Codes	Poverty	Increased Population Diversity	Changing & growing demands	Obstacles for family engagement	Challenges of children's development	Promise Neighborhood's Role
Parent	189	4	14	111	5	12	43
Public Sector	119	6	8	77	1	3	21
School	295	23	17	123	25	38	73
Volunteer	297	35	15	167	17	19	66
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>203</b>

Table 3.

*The percentage of codes, by category, by group of stakeholders.*

Group	% Codes	Poverty	Increased Population Diversity	Changing & growing demands	Obstacles for family engagement	Challenges of children's development	Promise Neighborhood's Role
Parent	21%	2%	7%	59%	3%	23%	6%
Public Sector	13%	5%	7%	65%	1%	18%	3%
School	33%	8%	6%	42%	8%	25%	13%
Volunteer	33%	12%	5%	56%	6%	22%	6%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>8%</b>

## Findings

The interviews with stakeholders provided a variety of perspectives about their experience of the changes occurred in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud, the influence on community wellness, and their expectations about the support from community organizations such as the Promise Neighborhood. The following highlighted key findings grouped in the six main with sub-themes under each main theme. Knowledge gained from the observation envisioned the engagement of school stakeholders' expectations into current activities.

## Poverty

Consistent with previous research results and the census data, poverty was still mentioned frequently in this study as one of the top issues in this community that were associated with or led to many other issues in healthy living. This area had the poverty rate that was higher than the city's average, reflected by the demographic composition of school students. There was more low-income housing here but still facing the problem of homelessness. One of the schools experienced a fairly consistent homeless student ratio with years past. Community members indicated that there was a lack of healthy food and the schools had a much higher-than-average free and reduced lunch rate. Sometimes people did not work not because they had no appropriate skills, but because they needed to take care of their kids at home. The daycare services in this area were too expensive for low-income families to afford, and the situation became worse for single parents and for parents of kids with health issues, especially when they were new to the area with not supportive social connection.

*"From what I'm used to it is way more expensive here. Way more expensive. I mean, when I did childcare back where I lived at in Detroit, my kids was in daycare and out of the month I was only coming out of probably \$400. Here, I need to pay like \$700 a week." (Stakeholder 27)*

## Increased cultural diversity

Interviewees perceived the increasing population of Somali immigrants and relocated African Americans in recent decades. In 2000, it was predominantly white in the Talahi community, while now it is almost the “flip-flop” of it. They observed more African-American and more Somali cultures. People came to this city usually because there were relatives and friends, making it easier for them to navigate the environment and access resources for living. In respect to this reason, this area would expect to have more diverse population in the near future. Students who were new to the country were more than most elementary buildings because of the nature of the location the schools were at in the neighborhood. Although there were efforts of social inclusiveness, stereotypes and imaging issues still existed. Interviewees considered that the increased cultural diversity in the population was a challenge but also a positive thing if these families could settle here with resources and supports in need. There was a high population of students who spoke a language other than English but “it was more culturally accepting and easier for them to integrate into this system because there were many people with similar demographics to them in this area”, as stakeholder 5 indicated.

## Changing and growing demands

The changing demographic composition brought in changing needs to this community. Within this theme, 47.7% of narratives called for effective, timely, sustainable, and culturally-appropriate solutions, and some of them referred to the Promise Neighborhood’s model. 34.8% was about the demands of the accessibility to resources, including health/mental health services, transportation services, information of resources, financial aids, affordable housing, parenting education, and healthy food and supplies.

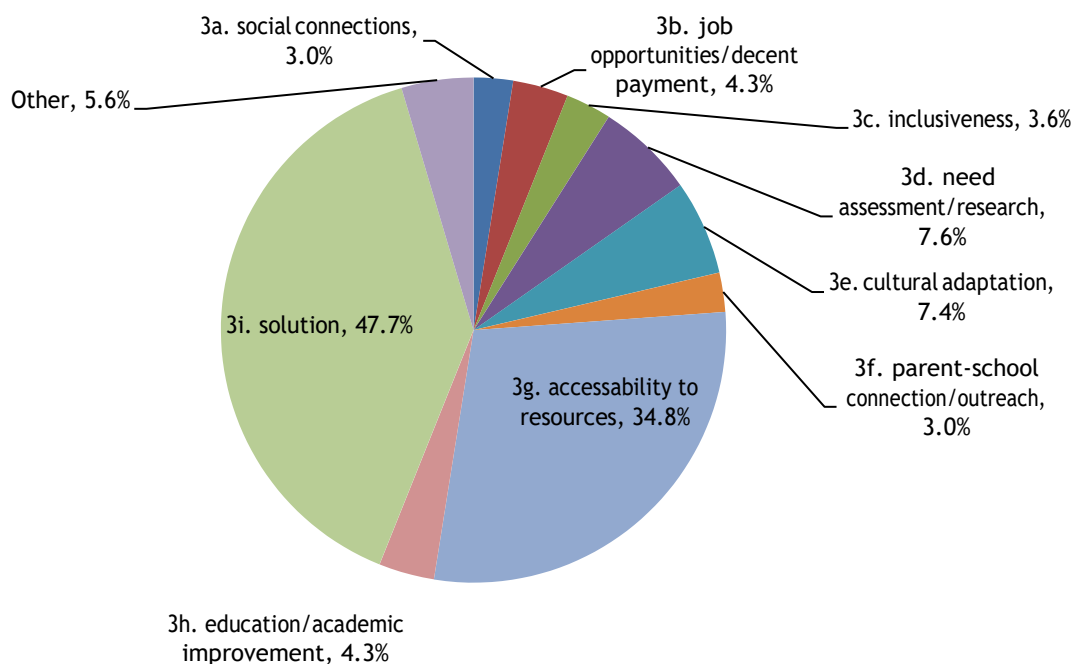


Figure 1. The percentage of each sub-category contained in “Growing and Changing Needs” (N = 478).

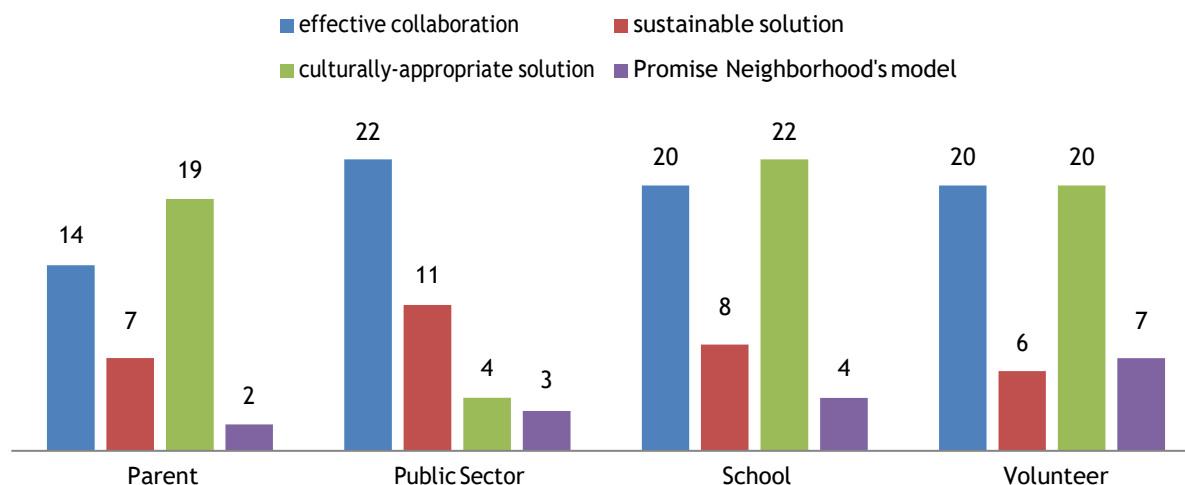


Figure 2. The count of each type of solution (code group 3i. Solution) expected by each stakeholder group.

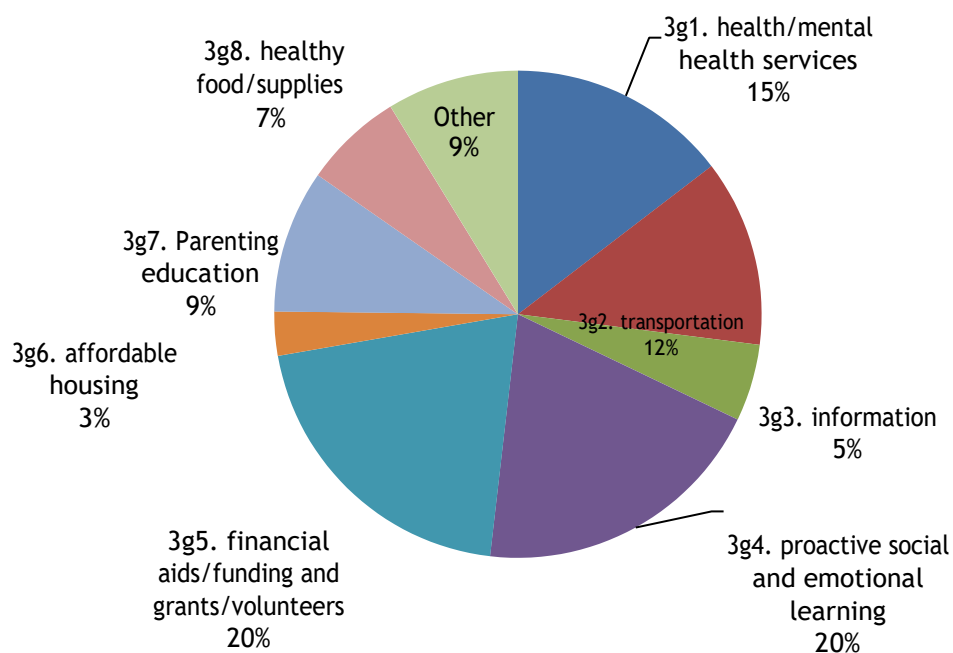


Figure 3. The percentage of the demand of each type of resources (code group 3g. accessibility to resources, N = 137).

### *The demand for culturally-appropriate solutions*

The new-to-the-country families had needs to be supported for their living and well-being, especially accessing community resources, navigating the education system, finding stable jobs, and so on. Other residents also had the needs to learn from the new culture and adapt to the changing community. This should be a mutual learning opportunity and would be beneficial to



all community members in the long run. Understanding and knowing the families should go first, however,

*“I would say there is not a needs assessment going on that I’m aware of, a broader base of what community needs are, and then there is not a survey that I’m aware of from a school standpoint at the moment... I guess I have not spent a ton of time taking a look into asking our families, from a Minnesota government perspective, how they are feeling supported.” (Stakeholder 13)*

Apart from refugees, there were also an increasing number of African American families that relocated to this area from other states. Interviewees suggested that people sometimes might misunderstood “culturally-appropriateness” with “racially-appropriateness”. Actually, although the African-American population and other black population were all recognized as “Black/African Americans” in many demographic information systems, there was a huge difference between the African-American culture and the other blacks’ cultures, such as Somali. The cultural difference was embodied in their belief systems, life styles, histories, languages, and so on, which influenced their social relationships, senses of community, and even social welfare status. Some interviewees perceived that there were more community services and facilities provided for the Somali population that the other groups in need might not have equivalent accessibility to, and Promise Neighborhood was thus the only place in this community that really focused on African American families.

Understanding cultural difference was also important when it came to education. There were different perceptions of what education was and was not among different ethnic groups. There were also disagreements on the criteria of behavioral and emotional issues from the perspectives of parenting styles in different cultures. Just because that some behaviors were recognized as “behavioral issues” in the traditional western culture, did not mean that they were issues in all other cultures, as quoted from Stakeholder 10 and 13 respectively:

*“I guess some behaviors were increasing especially with the Somali culture there. They came from Africa. They came from a place where they didn’t go to school. Many of the kids did not know how to behave at school so they did not know their protocol.”*

*“Sometimes our new to country students are English learning students, who are second language learners, are going to just need some more time than what is on those state proficiency scores. So it is really more intentionally focused on how to cultivate learning for each individual student and look at their growth versus their proficiency.”*

There should be mutual learning and understanding in order to find out a culturally-appropriate solution, however,

*“a lot of our kids are black kids and a lot of the teachers or the school are white-dominant, and they cannot handle and deal with the situations from our kids” (Stakeholder 15), and “you can teach them how to add and subtract in school but cannot teach kids how to adjust outside of school or how to work in real world. Caucasian tried to teach an African American specialty, like boys growing up and stuff like that. We heard news about that but we do not have people in district 742 teach kids about stuff like that” (Stakeholder 26).*

Schools were trying to recruit more diversified staff but the resource in the market was so limited. There is an urgent need to promote a pipeline to build capacity of black and African American teachers. It is more importantly to promote communication about mutual understanding instead of imposing western educational methods and judgement on minority community members, and help existing staff to establish cultural competence.

*The demand for effective, timely, and sustainable solutions*

*“A lot of places they have or they're thinking about having is basically going to tell everybody the same thing or they're going to gather resources. Not a lot of places really get to know you and get to know how you live every day and what problems you need or what we can help with or what social skills we can develop to get everybody on a good track.” (Stakeholder 26)*

*“If you tell me to call this number, you'll have to set up appointment, what is going to do for now? That'd be the biggest problem. They want you to call, they want you to wait, or they're willing to follow up. But what about the people that need help as we speak? What if I ran out of food today? You can't plan crisis a month out. If something was to happen today, you would need the help today. You wouldn't need the help next week cause everything would already been happening by then.” (Stakeholder 27)*

These comments reflected the lack of timely supports when emergent needs occurred. For families experiencing a hard period and crisis, it would be desperate if there could not be an urgent help to solve their problem, which were usually related to the basics for living, such as food and housing. There were resources out there in the community. The county, United Way, the Kellogg grant, and nearby churches helped a lot. Speaking of health, schools were currently working with CentraCare Health, Leukemia Foundation, and organizations that provided free dental services and free glasses, while many services were just not provided in a timely manner. Again, Promise Neighborhood was referred to as the only place that these families could go and get timely help, such as a check for rent, food, transportation, and diapers. However, a more sustainable and effective problem-solving system should be established in this community.

In addition, there was a lack of effective collaboration among sectors and organizations, and the solutions were usually inconsistent, which impeded a real change on the target population. Some of the interviewees had been invited to meetings with people from the government, law enforcement, and school institutions to talk about community issues. However, there were few things systematically facilitated with an action plan as far as they knew. Sometimes, entities in this district had good intentions and things were put in place, then after a bit effort, they moved onto the next thing. *“We do not necessarily put all our efforts into one idea and funded appropriately and then it might get a little better”*, stakeholder 5 commented. Stakeholder 11 and 12 added to it:

*“I think ideally there would be collaboration between all organizations, even an informal conversation. This conversation we're having right now, but with medical providers at the table and mental health providers. I think they're on board and willing to start those conversations. I think we need support from our medical community big time and not such a, I think sometimes it feels so formal and rigid.”*

Some barriers to effective collaboration included data privacy as families did not want their personal information or comments aired everywhere. Nevertheless, stakeholder 11 indicated that there should be a lot of work that can be done more efficiently.

## Obstacles of Family Engagement

The barriers for parents to involve in community and school events included their limited schedule when some parents had to take two or even three jobs; transportation, especially for families of several kids; the bad weather during the winter; language issues; etc. If parents had negative previous personal experience in schools and in the community, lacked basic knowledge in parenting and children's development, did not fully understand the value of connecting with the schools and teacher, or did not feel fully represented in the school setting or in the community at large, then they were less likely to respond to invitations and even requirements.

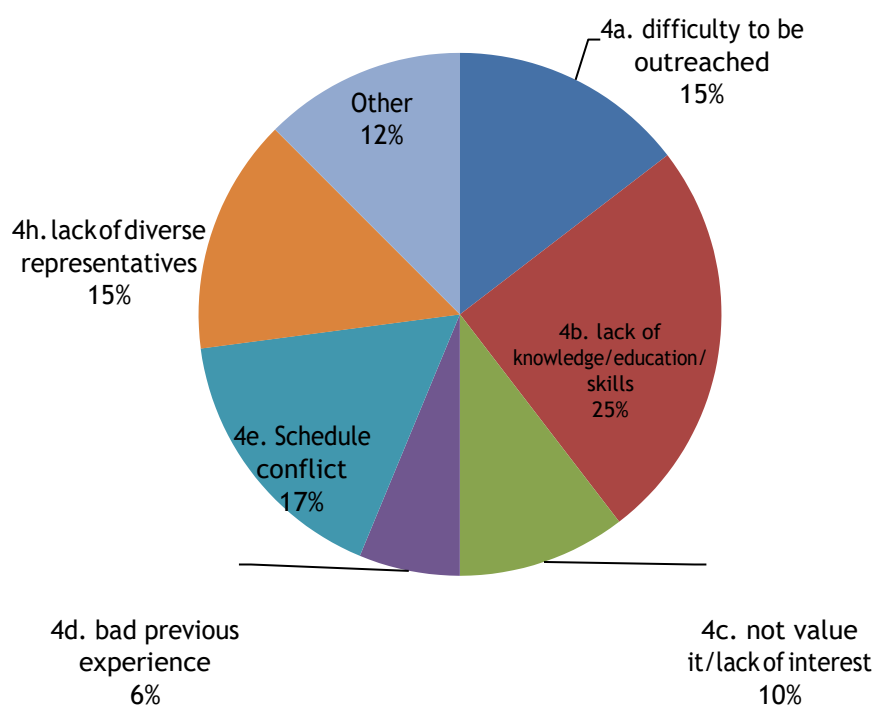


Figure 4. The percentage of each sub-category contained in “Obstacles of Family Engagement” (N = 48).

Interviewees mentioned that there would like to participate in more family-oriented community events where they could meet with other new-to-the community parents and members. It made them more comfortable if there were people of their own cultural background. One of the interviewees moved to this area for almost four years without building up any real friendship with others. This interviewee wanted more social connections but there were just not enough opportunities.

Schools in this district faced similar challenges in outreaching the most marginalized population. Besides phone calls, texting, emails, and paper copies, teachers had tried to be more active on social media, doing presentations, and sending out newsletters, while it was still difficult to

deliver the information to the entire target. The students who had the highest needs, those parents were the hardest to get in. There was a need for parenting classes, but the problem came when there were a variety of levels in which parents wanted information. As a result, those who attended these classes were not always the ones who really needed it the most. School principals mentioned that it would be nice to have more parent volunteer in the schools which made parents feel that they were part of the team, instead of just coming for a behavioral issue. They were open to considering potential partnerships with community organizations and sharing resources, in order to strengthen the connection among schools, families, and the community, so as to interactively provide in-school and out-of-school supports for children and families.

With existing services and strategies in planning, interviewees thought that they needed to move closer to families experiencing domestic violence, exposed to drugs, or suffering other traumatic issues. There was a need to have more resources and a better way to make resources effectively work for families. Interviewees reflected that some parents did not really know about all the resources on site and how they could help with their life. There probably should be some kind of brochure or a checklist of services and programs that the schools and partners provided to guide community members. Anyway, solutions should be effective, timely, sustainable and culturally appropriate.

## Challenges for Children's Development

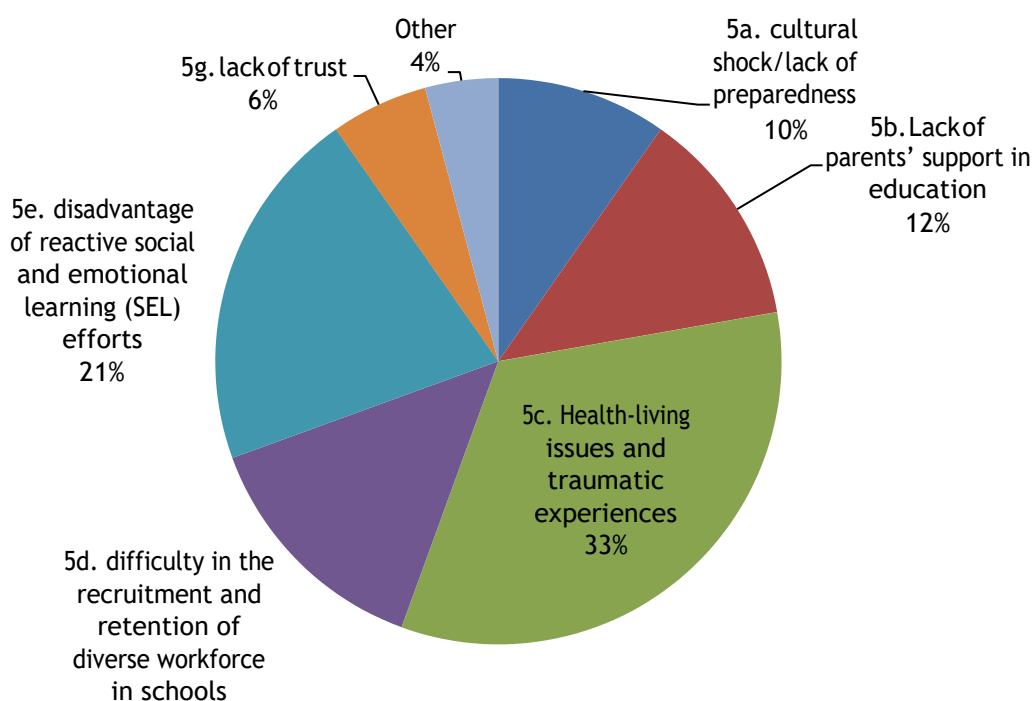


Figure 5. The percentage of each sub-category contained in "Challenges for children's development" (N = 72).

*Cultural shock and lack of preparedness:* Some historical issues and environmental factors limited families' and children's access to the appropriate level of education. The high frequency of mobility and other domestic issues led to inconsistency in education. It caused their maladjustment in the new educational system.

*Lack of parents' support in education:* Sometimes, parents' educational experience limited their capability of helping their children with academic problems. In addition, parents not always perceive the value of home-school connection and the importance of their participation in schools' activities and events. Other family issues also prevented parents from effectively supporting their children. For example, if parents were working on the night shifts or having several kids and infants to take care of, then they would not always be able to sit down and read with children or sign an agenda planner for their kids. In this situation, looking for an additional source of support became critical for children's development. Interviewees suggested that it did not have to be a parent, but *"can be a good adult who is checking in with the children and signing off on a planner or helping to assist academically in that manner"* (stakeholder 13).

*Healthy-living issues and trauma experiences:* Widely defined, anything happened that negatively impacted children's emotional and physical well-being was trauma experience, from food insecurity, domestic violence, exposed to drugs, unstable housing, to greater life-changing experiences. Interviewees told that, unfortunately, there were quite a number of children who had some family member or loved ones that were incarcerated or left. Stakeholder 10 provided a case:

*"I have a couple of students that have a lot of trauma going on at home. One of my students that also I know attends Promised Neighborhood. He does not have a lot of family connection piece. So he looks for those connections here at school and at Promised Neighborhood. He does not want to go home. I do struggle with him because he does not have that school-home connection like a lot of our other kids."*

These issues were definitely associated with poverty in this area to some extent and influenced children's performance in the school. The exposure to trauma impacted attendance, academics, and discipline and behavior, as Stakeholder 11 and 12 said:

*"I would say our school experiences a pretty high level of mobility and turnover and housing. So housing concerns lead to the movement for kids... I would say at least 90% of the need to relocate was due to something that happened to the family. It might be financial trauma. It might be lost of housing, domestic violence, death."*

Thus making children feel safe physically and mentally was important. What was identically important was to know the child as a whole that they were coming from different backgrounds with so many issues that they had to deal with at home. *"If we are not dealing with their social and emotional piece they would not get to that educational piece"*, Stakeholder 10 added.

*Difficulty in the recruitment and retention of diverse workforce in schools:* Schools were aware of the non-diversity issue in staff, but it was not easy to recruit appropriate new staff because of the unbalanced market status. Apart from the shortage of candidates, interviewees witnessed an

unaligned cost and benefit of the job for a new teacher. There were approximately 70% of licensed teachers were not utilizing their licensure and education just within the state. There was also a lack of internal counselor. Having one school counselor and almost 600 students, students could not see counselor frequently. It would be good to have more licensed mental health staff on site. Moreover, there was a high turnover among staff, so even when there were efforts in place, it was hard to sustain things along with a lot of moving.

*Disadvantage of reactive social and emotional learning (SEL) efforts:* Sometimes the problem was not lie in the lack of SEL plan, but in the reactive style. The rate for a number of students receiving special education service was significantly high in this district (20%) compared to the national average (13%), while the reactive style could generate false positive cases that negatively influence children's development. Proactive-style social and emotional learning was proposed by several interviewees. Anyway, people could not expect children to act in a certain way unless they knew what the expectation was.

*"I've seen many times where things haven't gotten better and we look at moving a student onto a special education referral because of behavior difficulties and once they are in service with trained people who provide that consistent proactive piece and reactive, the behaviors get significantly better."* (Stakeholder 5)

*Lack of a consistent and culturally-adapted proactive SEL model:* Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) was the strategy usually used among schools as a traditional approach of healthy and positive behaviors' development. Schools had several behavior interventionists to support with that. There were strategies to help parents get a good understanding of how PBIS matrix operated within the school. Interviewees were aware of children who were closed and would carefully select practices that could approach them.

PBIS mainly focused on behavior issues, while the SEL had a broader focus on children's overall competencies in emotion management, positive goals achievement, sense of empathy for others, positive relationships establishment, and responsible decision making. However, there was no consistent and solid model that worked across institutions. The state of Minnesota proposed SEL standards, but it might need to be culturally adapted to the context in this area. Schools were looking for appropriate models, curriculums, and resources to deliver this piece, while there was a lack of consistent approach and there was a gap in understanding the needs of children in a culturally-appropriate manner.

*"They have got leadership skills because they are going home and taking care of things at home. So we are not maybe seeing that as an asset. I think it is a big gap in seeing strengths in kids and looking at what kids come here with. That might seem maladaptive, but it is important to ask why (before making a judgment)."* (Stakeholder 11)

Some schools created curriculum around SEL based on Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)'s framework (CASEL, 2012). They utilized CASEL's five competencies to come up with 10 lesson plans. The library stored books that they purchased with grant money. They conducted the Auto Be Good program, which was about character development. They did daily morning meetings and mindfulness to promote a healthy



community within the classroom and relationships among students. Students got into their day and had each month laid out peacemaker resources. One problem was about consistency. It was tough when students were absent or had an interrupted schedule to participate in these efforts.

*Lack of resources for African-American children other than Promise Neighborhood's services:*

In terms of academics, Kids' Stop provided an afterschool program through the Boys and Girls Club. It was perceived to be very structured and "*there are intentional activities set up for students to interact with each other to solve problems*" (stakeholder 5). Schools also had programs developed for after-class activities and the students were perceived to be well supported in the school context. Nevertheless, there was still a need for quality after-school caring programs in the community, especially for low-income African-American families.

## Promise Neighborhood's Role

The Promise Neighborhood is a community-led nonprofit organization located in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud, aiming at engaging and helping families in the Talahi community to achieve educational, economic, and community aspirations. It earned a positive reputation by serving low-income families and residents of color in sharing community resources information, supporting families, providing after-school programs, raising awareness of community issues, and representing community members.

*"This was like the only place I got and I've been here for three years. This is the only place that I and my kids are like come comfortably. They find a way to help you, the best way they can. They make you feel comfortable with it."* (Stakeholder 26)

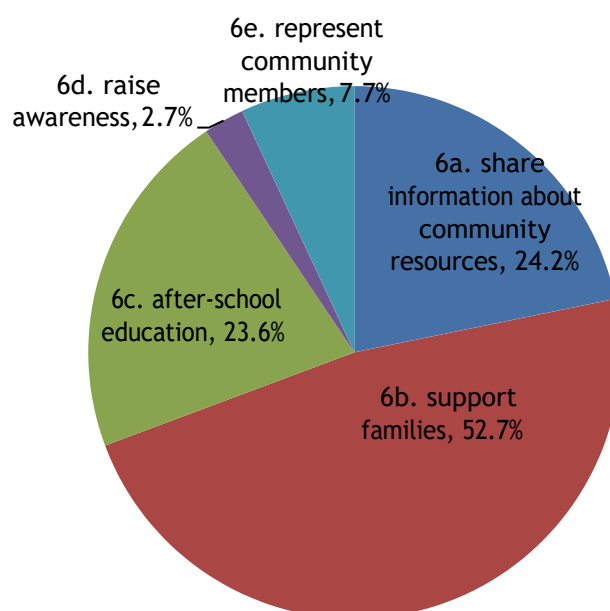


Figure 6. The percentage of each of the perceived functions that the Promise Neighborhood played (N = 203).

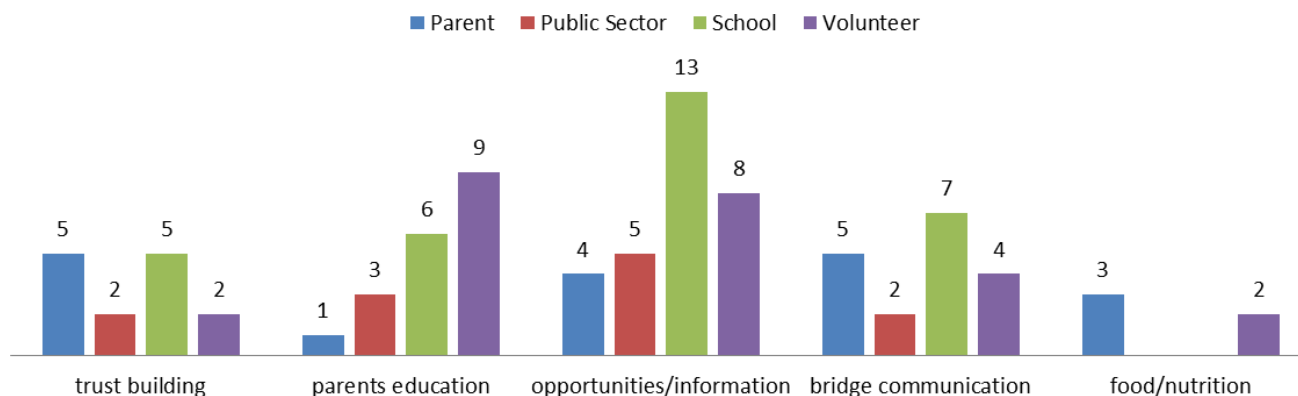


Figure 7. The count of codes of each type of function that the Promise Neighborhood plays to support families (code group 6b. support families), by stakeholder group.

*Support and engage families:* Interviewees highly appraised Promise Neighborhood's role and contribution to this community in terms of supporting families with their emergent, short-term, and long-term needs, and engaging families into community issues. Aiming at engaging Talahi families and helping families achieve educational, economic, and community aspirations, low-income families and families of color were always the target of this organization. Promise Neighborhood's advantage, compared with other community organizations in the area, was the focus on and their direct response to the special needs and demands of these families. The charisma of the Promise Neighborhood's executive director played an important role in facilitating trust among stakeholders, especially with parents who did not necessarily had the best past experience in the community. This organization was culturally representative that helped build up the sense of community among African-American families and residents of color. The following comments from interviewees demonstrated its role as the bridge:

*"We were having a hard time trying to engage parents and getting them in and then he worked his magic or he had a relationship and then they come and then we are able to move forward to support the family and the students."* (Stakeholder 5)

*"I know a lot of families have expressed appreciation and gratitude for the Promise Neighborhood and what it is meant to their family and how they have been supported through that."* (Stakeholder 6)

*"I think we know that when we have his support and his confidence, then I think parents will look to him to say 'is this a good place for my kids? Does this school care about my kid?' And I think that's super important."* (Stakeholder 11 & 12)

*"You have some (community organizations), but not specifically like Promise Neighborhood tailored and focuses there or families of color on the south side. I think it is a huge need."* (Stakeholder 3)

*"That really gives the teacher a good perspective of 'I can reach out and hold a student accountable if there is some extra practice or resources that they might need for support'."* (Stakeholder 13)

*Bridge communication and sharing information about community resources:* Promise Neighborhood connected schools and families not only through services for children and parents,

but also in providing job and volunteering opportunities. Some teachers spent time volunteering regularly at Promise Neighborhood, serving as tutors in math and reading. When Promise Neighborhood had reading and math activities, schools also coordinated to get teachers over and helped facilitate some of those programs after school. There were also some Promise Neighborhood's adult participants working in the school, helping out in the cafeteria. Promise Neighborhood shared information on social services and community resources for program participants. Their webpage was a good place for families to look up for the information that they need. Furthermore, Promise Neighborhood cooperated with community members to co-design programs as they brought in ideas and expertise into service design.

*Future expectations:* Interviewees expressed their expectations and opinions in terms of Promise Neighborhood's future service development and possible collaboration with other institutions and organizations. Firstly, they advocated increasing service frequency and expanding the scope of service that could cover a greater number of families in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud. Many families in need did not know anything about this organization because the information was usually spread out through the word of mouth. People could not come to participate in any activities if they lived a bit far away without a vehicle. People wished their kids could have a place to go every day to work on math and reading or build up social and emotional skills outside of school. Promise Neighborhood should be the better place for African-American kids.

Secondly, the observation shows that there could be additional SEL pieces engaged into current activities when mentors guide children in math and reading, or when staffs take care of children when they are playing games. It requires a cooperation with schools and experts who would propose a culturally-appropriate model, methods, training, and measurement tools. Stakeholders hoped Promise Neighborhood's service for children could be aligned with schools' efforts, in order to strengthen the consistency in children's learning and development. Promise Neighborhood may provide more support for the parents because *"obviously as a school, we do not provide enough support for parents or engage parents in SEL"*, quoted from stakeholder 5. The communication between Promise Neighborhood and schools should be continued in regards to the use of each other as effective resources.

Thirdly, it would be especially helpful if Promise Neighborhood can promote communication with families on sensitive topics that they usually would not share with the other stakeholders that they do not trust.

Moreover, it would be beneficial to take more advantage of diverse human resources in the community. For example, seniors (i.e., grandparents) are a fabulous connection and relationship with children; university students are good resources of mentors.

Last but not least, Promise Neighborhood may take a lead to align community resources like interviewees recommended:

*"I think that is a huge thing of trying to find ways to create a coalition or collaboration with all focused on some key things around risk community, organizations, resources, education, and then the city. I think*

*Promise Neighborhood is pretty known within those school communities to create partnerships.”*  
(Stakeholder 3)

*“I could see where that would be a very great resource in getting all of those community stakeholders at the table and talking through goals and making sure from a community perspective they are in alignment with what everyone is trying to accomplish.”* (Stakeholder 13)

Entities in the community have not really done anything together yet, and it is time to unite and organize resources more efficiently.

## Implication

Comprehensively considering community issues, challenges encountered by families, opinions and feedback from different groups of stakeholders, strategies taken to solve the issues, obstacles to get any progress, expectations for Promise Neighborhood’s role, and advocacy of collaborative efforts, the following recommendations may be worthy of further consideration for all community members:

- Apply systematic thinking in service design.
- Take a theory-driven approach in service providing: try to understand the mechanisms from action to expected and unexpected outcomes, in order to make a real and sustainable difference.
- Need assessment goes first, especially of those most marginalized population.
- Think positively about the change and take advantage of all the cultures.
- Be aware of the culture shock experienced by the new-to-the-country population but also by the rest of the community members.
- Engage the silenced and the hidden voices into the discussion, such as the families that are least engaged in school and community events.
- Community organizations, such as Promise Neighborhood, could take a lead and play as the platform of the discussion of collaborative solutions, finding out the connecting points for collaboration, such as a shared information and referral system that can help solve urgent needs for families in a timely manner. The funding and resources that the Promise Neighborhood has is somehow limited, while the network would increase the ability to satisfy more demands.

## Conclusion

This study of community members’ perspectives and experiences suggests that the changing demographics in the Southeast area of Saint Cloud, especially in the Talahi neighborhood, brought in community issues that might be or might not be experienced by other areas in the city. Many of those issues were closely related to or associated with poverty. There were changing and growing demands in regards to families’ surviving and well-being. Promise Neighborhood

played an inevitable role of connecting low-income minority families, especially African-American families, with the rest of the community.

The inputs from different groups of stakeholders suggest a call for a better collaborative solution in the community that confronts the challenges and obstacles that encountered by community members in family engagement, healthy living, and children's development. The service providers might need to take care of the sub-cultural differences within the minority population. The target families have more unforeseen crisis that requires rapid response and help. Some regular service system may take too long to really make a difference to their life. This informed the community organizations', such as Promise Neighborhood's, future design of services to better connect and serve the community and families in a more effective and timely way. It would cost additional resources and require more financial support in establishing a culturally-appropriate framework, but it would be rewarding to push for a greater change by addressing the collaboration.

Generally, the result indicates the importance of the following phases of studies and actions, and leads to additional research questions that are related to the feasibility and sustainability of practices. Anyway, the published word is not the final word, but only a benchmark in the never-ending process of learning from the community in the changing environment.

### *Acknowledgement*

Many thanks to the co-designers of this research project, including John Smith from Promise Neighborhood, Tyson Zitzow from Talahi Elementary School, and Pamela Beckering from CentraCare Health, for their supports in connecting stakeholders and providing suggestions throughout the research. Thanks to community members for providing inputs into this study.

# References

- Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (Eds.). (2007). *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*. Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2012). *2013 CASEL guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs—Preschool and elementary school edition*. Retrieved from <https://casel.org/preschool-and-elementary-edition-casel-guide/>
- City of Saint Cloud. (n.d.). *Demographics*. Retrieved from <https://www.ci.stcloud.mn.us/1261/Demographics>
- Finan, A. & Hemmesch, A. (2018). *East Saint Cloud neighborhood health study—key informant interviews*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Garcia-Perez, M. (2017). *Health interventions in a local community—stage 1: evaluating ZIP code area 56304 using public demographics/socioeconomic information and clinical data*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldire.
- Holton, J. A. (2007). The coding process and its challenges. In *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, 265-289. Sage.
- Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., Becker, A. B., Allen, A., Guzman, J. R., & Lichtenstein, R. (2008). Critical issues in developing and following CBPR principles. In *Community-based participatory research for health*, 47-62. Jossey-Bass.
- Martin, P. Y., & Turner, B. A. (1986). Grounded theory and organizational research. *The journal of applied behavioral science*, 22(2), 141-157.
- Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/st-cloud>
- Public School Review. (n.d.). *Talahi Community Elementary School*. Retrieved from <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/talahi-community-elementary-school-profile>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/>



# Appendix I

## The Interview Protocol for School Principals

**Purpose of Interview:** learn about the school stakeholder's perspectives on positive youth development and family engagement in the community, the efforts taken to promote community development through education, as well as the views and concerns about the program development of Promise Neighborhood.

### Opening Questions

1. Please describe your role in the school and in the neighborhood.
2. Please describe the demographic composition/characteristics of students and families that this school serves.

### Community Issues

3. As you observed, what are the major changes occurring in the neighborhood?
4. What are the challenges the school confronts along with the context change?
5. How do these challenges influence this school regarding its
  - Demographic composition?
  - Mission and goals?
  - Strategies?
  - Role in the community?
6. As far as you know, what are the other efforts this community has taken to address these challenges?
7. From your perspective, what are the gaps existing for additional efforts?

### Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

8. What do you perceive as the challenges for youth's development in this school?
9. How well do you know about the concepts and strategies of PYD and SEL?
10. How do school's strategies address PYD and SEL, if any?
  - What are the goals and objectives?
  - How does the current model get inspired?
  - Please describe the parents' engagement strategy.
  - Please describe the extracurricular activities.
  - What are the achievements generated by the strategies?

(If none) Have there been discussions about this topic in the school or in the community?

11. What are the challenges the school leadership has encountered in terms of PYD and SEL?

12. How does this school address the needs of students from low-income families or students of color?

13. How does this school engage parents of underrepresented and disadvantaged families?

- What do you think about parents' participation in school events and activities (i.e., actively or passively, frequently or rarely, etc.)?
- What are the barriers for parents' participation?

### **Promise Neighborhood Program**

14. Generally, how does the school pursue its goals and objectives in partnership with the surrounding community-led organizations?

15. How do you perceive the community organizations' role in PYD and SEL?

- What do you think about the relationship between in-class and out-of-class activities?

16. How do community organizations can help with parents' engagement in the school?

17. How did you become aware of the Promise Neighborhood program?

18. What do you perceive as the advantages of this program?

19. What are the current interactions (if any) between this school and this program?

- Please describe the activities.
- Who are the key stakeholders involved in the process?
- What is your expectation for the achievement of these interactions?

20. What are the opportunities for further collaboration between this school and this program?

### **Ending Question**

21. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that I didn't cover in this interview that you think is important for me to know?

22. Are there any other staff or organizations we should speak to about this?

## Appendix II

### The Interview Protocol for School Staff

**Purpose of Interview:** learn about the school stakeholder's perspectives on positive youth development and family engagement in the community, the efforts taken to promote community development through education, as well as the views and concerns about the interaction between in-class and after-class activities.

#### Opening Question

1. Please describe your role in the school and in the neighborhood.

#### Community Issues

2. As you observed, what are the major changes occurring in the neighborhood?
3. How do these challenges influence this school?
4. As far as you know, what are the efforts this school has taken to address these challenges?
5. From your perspective, what are the gaps existing for additional efforts?

#### Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

6. Could you please describe your daily interaction with students?
  7. What do you perceive as the challenges for youth's development in this school?
  8. How well do you know about the concepts and strategies of PYD and SEL?
    - How do you feel about the general level of your students' SE skills?
    - Is there evidence or example to support your feeling?
  9. How does your work address PYD and SEL, if any?
    - What are the goals and objectives?
    - What are the activities (in-class or extracurricular)?
    - Are there any achievements generated by the activities?
- (If none) Have there been discussions about this topic in the school?
10. What are the challenges that you have encountered in terms of PYD and SEL?
  11. How does this school address the needs of students from low-income families and students of color?

12. How does your work help engage parents of underrepresented and disadvantaged families?

- How do you feel about parents' participation in school events and activities (i.e., actively or passively, frequently or rarely, etc.)
- What are the barriers for parents' participation?

### **Promise Neighborhood Program**

13. How do you perceive the out-of-class activities' role in PYD and SEL?

- What do you expect your students to gain from the out-of-class activities?
- What do you think about the relationship between in-class and out-of-class activities?

14. From your perspective, how do community organizations can help with parents' engagement in the school?

15. How did you become aware of the Promise Neighborhood program?

16. What do you perceive as the advantages of this program?

17. As a teacher, what's your suggestion for the service design by the Promise Neighborhood?

### **Ending Question**

18. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that I didn't cover in this interview that you think is important for me to know?

19. Are there any other staff or organizations we should speak to about this?

- Do I have your permission to let them know you suggested we reach out to them?

## Appendix III

### The Interview Protocol for Public Sector Officials

**Purpose of Interview:** learn about the public sector's involvement in the community development in the Talahi Neighborhood / southeast area of St. Cloud, as well as the views and concerns about the program development of community organizations.

#### General District Plan

1. Generally, what are the goals and objectives of the city's plan for the southeast area of St. Cloud?

2. What are the major changes occurring in this area?

3. What are the challenges the city confronts along with the context change?

#### Community Prosperity

4. How does the government respond to the challenges mentioned above to promote community prosperity?

5. How do current policies or social service programs support families' economic well-being in this city (especially for families of low income and diverse cultural composition)?

6. What resources does the government provide to support the relative community efforts?

7. How does the city/county government engage the community in changes?

8. What are the gaps existing for additional efforts?

#### The Youth Development Issue

9. What do you perceive as the challenges for youth's development in this area due to the change?

10. How do current policy or social service programs support the development of children/youth of color and children/youth from low-income families?

- What is the focus of these policies?
- Are they theory-driven approaches?

11. What resources does the government provide to support the relevant community efforts?

12. How does information (about resources) go to the target community population?

13. What are the gaps existing for additional efforts?

14. How do you perceive the future cross-sector collaboration on the development of children/youth of color and children/youth from low-income families?

### **Promise Neighborhood Program**

15. How did you become aware of the Promise Neighborhood program?

16. How do you feel about the value of this program?

17. Please describe your engagement with the other stakeholders of this program.

18. What are the current interactions (if any) between the local leadership and this program?

- What are the resources invested?
- Please describe the activities.
- Please describe the key stakeholders involved in the process.

19. What is your expectation for the achievement of these interactions?

20. What are the opportunities for further collaboration between the local leadership and this program?

### **Ending Question**

21. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that I didn't cover in this interview that you think is important for me to know?

22. Are there any other staff or organizations we should speak to about this?

- Do I have your permission to let them know you suggested we reach out to them?



## Appendix IV

### The Interview Protocol for Volunteers

**Purpose of Interview:** learn about the school stakeholder's perspectives on the community issues and challenges, as well as the views and concerns about the program development of Promise Neighborhood.

#### **Volunteer Experience**

1. Please describe your role as a volunteer for the Promise Neighborhood.
  - How did you become aware of the Promise Neighborhood program?
  - How long have you been with this program?
  - What activities and responsibilities do you have as a volunteer?
  - What is your motivation to keep on serving for the promise Neighborhood?
2. How do you interact with other stakeholders of the Promise Neighborhood (if any)?

#### **Community Issues**

3. As far as you know, what are the major changes occurring in the Talahi neighborhood/southeast area of St. Cloud?
4. What are the challenges this neighborhood confronts along with the context change?
5. How does your personal experience connect with these challenges?
6. What do you think are the unique challenges that the low-income families and families of color face in this community?
7. What do you think are the unique challenges that the children from low-income families and families of color face in this community?
8. As far as you know, what are the efforts this community has taken to address these challenges?
  - In the public sector (i.e., policies, public services programs)?
  - In the private sector?
  - In the third sector (i.e., nonprofit organizational programs)?
9. As far as you know, what are additional social resources accessible for these children and families?
10. As a community member, how do you perceive the gaps that exist for additional efforts?

### **Promise Neighborhood Program**

11. How do you perceive the Promise Neighborhood's role in this community regarding these challenges?

- From your perspective, what are the necessities for children's development?
- How do you think about the role of out-of-class activities for children's development?
- What has this organization done to improve children's development?

12. What do you perceive as the advantages of this program?

13. What do you perceive as the challenges for this program?

14. How well do you know about Promise Neighborhood's overall strategy and action plan?

15. How do you think your personal experiences would help accomplish its goals and objectives?

16. What recommendations do you have for better program development?

### **Ending Question**

21. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that I didn't cover in this interview that you think is important for me to know?

22. Are there any other staff or organizations we should speak to about this?

- Do I have your permission to let them know you suggested we reach out to them?

## Appendix V

# The Interview Protocol for Parents

**Purpose of Interview:** The interview would be conducted to learn about parent participants' perspectives on the community/neighborhood issues and challenges, efforts and barriers on children's health and development, and concerns about the program development of Promise Neighborhood.

### Community Issues

1. Please briefly describe when and why you came to live in this neighborhood.
2. Based on your experience, what are the issues in the neighborhood that may influence residents' healthy living?
3. What are the challenges that your family confronts in this community currently?
4. As far as you know, what are the community resources that can help your family with these challenges?
  - How do you get the information about the resources?
  - How do you access the resources?

### Child Health and Development

5. Do you have any concern about your child's behavioral and emotional development?
6. As a parent, what do you do to promote your child's health and development (e.g., involving school activities, balancing food nutrition, learning healthy parenting skills, etc.)?
  - Social skills improvement
  - Academic improvement
  - Self-management and self-awareness development
7. From your experience,
  - What are the negative factors in the neighborhood that influence your child's health and development?
  - What are the positive factors in the neighborhood that influence your child's health and development?
  - What might be negative factors in your home that influence your child's health and development?
  - What are the positive factors in your home that influence your child's health and development?

8. What are the community resources that can help your child's health and development?

9. What are additional social resources and services do you and your child need?

**Promise Neighborhood Program**

10. What programs have you and your child participated in?

11. Could you please describe the most impressive experience in this program?

12. How do you expect the Promise Neighborhood to support your family?

13. How do you expect the Promise Neighborhood to support your child's health and development?

**Ending Question**

14. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that I didn't cover in this interview that you think is important for me to know?

## Appendix VI

### Observation Notes

Time: February 22, 2019, 4:50pm - 6:50pm

Location: The Promise Neighborhood's building

Observer: Yue Zhang

Activity: Youth Night Project (i.e., Math Club)

The observer has an interview in Promise Neighborhood's building in the afternoon and stays until the Youth Night ends that night. The staff starts preparing food for youth participants in the afternoon, and reminds participants to check in before the activities started.

The building has two levels, the upper level contains a meeting room (where the stakeholders meeting is held and staff/volunteer training goes), a reading room (named as Lois's Little Library, in which there are three bookshelves full of reading materials), and a computer room (where youth do math and reading tests and there are five more bookshelves with well-organized reading materials). The lower level is a large activity room, containing toys, a television, games (non-violent as mentioned by the staff), and a kitchen. Parents sent kids here and left at 5:00 pm.

25 kids (12 boys and 13 girls, of all colors) started having food at the lower level. There are several long tables and dining tables with chairs. Tonight's foods are pizzas and burgers with fruit juice. A black male staff stands aside from the dining tables and having food with the kids [OR: the demographic characteristics of the staff are described because it matches with the target population. Since it has been mentioned that there are different parenting styles among different ethnic groups, it reflects Promise Neighborhood's strategy and advantage.]. The observer sits at the corner, making no interruption. At 5:10 pm, a black female staff come downstairs with a check-in board and asks five kids to go upstairs voluntarily with her. After finishing eating, kids start playing balls, the foosball table, car-racing tolls, drawing pictures, etc. The male staff takes care of kids downstairs, and asks boys "not to throw balls to the others". The female staff comes down again five minutes later, taking two more kids upstairs. Two boys quarrel when playing the car-racing game, and the male staff goes to them and lets them be nice to each other. When boys take stuff out of the room, the staff asks them to play at the right place. The staff is also cleaning the space with a broom during the time. There are two volunteers coming in at 5:20 pm.

The observer moves to the upper level at 5:25 pm. On the front wall of this room, there is a Bulletin board, on which are information about some other projects and posters with "Peace and Justice" "THINK", etc. [OR: these materials would unconsciously influence people sitting and learning in the room.] Kids are having one-on-one mentoring activities upstairs. There are seven pairs in the meeting room already. The lights are bright. There are three youth mentors, a middle-aged mentor, and two elder mentors. The tables and chairs are organized in two columns. Each pair takes one table and having different types of activities. The three pairs at the left column are

dealing with addition and subtraction or multiplication and division questions. When the observer gets into the room, the pairs at the right column are dealing with math problems and learning mathematics concepts through developmental games, such as “Sorry!” (counting on the chess board), “Mountain Riders” (counting dices), “Match-it!-Time” (...), Pizza Fraction Fun (understanding the concepts and calculation of fractions), etc. Kids should finish a calculation sheet first, and playing a game-math afterward. There is a box on the table with “Math” written on the side, inside which are working sheets for each math-related activities. The mentors greet with the kids, check their grades, and ask them what they would like to do tonight, and grab the games and the working sheet for them accordingly. The mentors are all patient and encouraging, saying something like “You are doing very well!” and “Good job!” to the kids. When finishing assisting each kid, the mentor will put the completed working sheet into a file. Kids go back downstairs to play after finishing their tasks.

Two staffs keep checking in with the mentors. When there is someone who finished, they bring a new kid upstairs. An additional mentor comes into the meeting room at 5:40 pm, and one of the staff tells him what the materials are on the tables, and he starts playing the “Sorry!” with a boy. At 5:42 pm, a staff comes to remind the pair in front of the observer that this kid will have two more minutes. The mentor finishes their activities within the time schedule, and meets another boy mentee right after. The mentor directed the boy to grab the thing that he would like to do. The boy stops at the table for a while, and the mentor goes to help him. The boy starts dealing with the addition and subtraction questionnaire by himself at 5:55 pm. The mentor sits beside and watches, providing a few suggestions when the boy stuck. The boy finished the sheet at 6:10 pm, and he chooses not to play the game tonight. He said “Thank you for working it with me!” to the mentor when he leaves. The staff brings another girl to the mentor, with a pack of homework sheets that her mom handed to the staff. One more mentor checks in at 6:15 pm.

The observer moves to the computer room at 6:30 pm, sitting at the spot where has the view of the whole room as well as the Lois’s Little Library. There are three mentors sitting with different kids on the table and on the sofa, each of whom has a book in hand. [OR: the environment is quiet, comfortable, and cozy, just like the fireplace at home, makes people feel relaxed and safe.] The pair on the same table with the observer is reading a children’s book with pictures and limited words. The mentor read the sentences word-by-word with the kid. He explains the new words by making connections with the pictures on the same page. The pair in an armchair is reading Disney’s Simple Science. The kid is reading by himself, word by word, and the mentor delivers help when necessary. Kids can also do readings on the computer software, one-at-a-time with a mentor. At 6:40pm, a staff comes in and lets people know that they are going to serve cakes downstairs. The mentor tells the kid that he can go for the treat after finishing the reading.

Kids are having cakes and waiting for parents to come to pick them up. Some parents arrived earlier who are chatting with each other. Mentors and staffs clean things up. Staffs are saying thanks for volunteer mentors. There are still three kids staying in the reading room and the computer room, reading with the mentors. A boy finished reading one module, and the mentor

tells him coming back to complete another one after finishing his cake. The observer leaves at 6:50 pm.

(Photos taken during the observation show the setting of the rooms, materials, and the mentoring activity.)

